

Rediscovery of the Monteiro's Bush-shrike *Malaconotus monteiri* in Cameroon

S. Mark Andrews



Monteiro's Bush-shrike *Malaconotus monteiri*
by S. Mark Andrews

The Monteiro's Bush-shrike is an enigma in African ornithology. The species is known only from the escarpment of western Angola (no records since 1954) and Mount Cameroon (Collar & Stuart¹). What little is known about the species has come from a limited number of birds collected from within the escarpment zone of Angola. A very similar bird was described from Buea at 1,000m on Mount Cameroon in 1894 (Reichenow²): it was originally named *Laniarius perspicillatus* but is 'practically indistinguishable from *monteiri*' and remains the only record from Mount Cameroon (Serle³). Recently, Prigogine⁴ investigated this problem and provided evidence for considering the Mount Cameroon specimen to be subspecifically distinct, as *Malaconotus monteiri perspicillatus*⁵. Failure of subsequent observers to locate the species on Mount Cameroon led to the record being open to question.

On 21 September 1992, whilst ascending the western slopes of Mount Kupe in primary montane forest with Tom Gullick and Steve Keen in search of endemics, I heard a distant Green-breasted Bush-shrike *M. gladiator* calling. Its distinctive far-carrying call can be readily imitated and, after 30 minutes of whistling and climbing, I eventually managed to draw the bird in. At 1450 m some confusion arose as to which direction the bird was coming from as excited whistles echoed all around. We quickly pinpointed a Green-breasted Bush-shrike as it flew to perch on a branch just above us. Almost immediately, a second bird arrived and, to

our amazement, was clearly a different species. The birds, briefly in the same view, promptly started 'duetting' and bill rattling, both throwing heads back with a 'staccato' movement downwards. Clearly agitated, the Green-breasted moved slowly away from the area allowing us to concentrate on the second bird. Superficially resembling Grey-headed Bush-shrike *M. blanchoti*, the bird differed in structure being much heavier, especially the bill width and length which, together with the white of the lores extending above and below the eye in half-moon fashion, identified it as Monteiro's Bush-shrike. Clean lemon-yellow 'anchors' on the tertial and covert tips with uniform lemon-yellow underparts gave the bird an immaculate appearance. The call, very similar to the mournful whistle of *M. gladiator*, was a slightly shorter note repeated five, as opposed to three, times without the slight inflection at the end of each note. The bird was easily located hours later by call, and by imitating the five note whistle we brought the bird in.

An important note to add to this observation was that the bird, when alongside *M. gladiator*, appeared larger. I examined skins held in the British Museum of birds collected in Angola, and they were all smaller in size when I compared them with *M. gladiator* skins.

I thank Chief R.M. Ntoko and the Bakossi people for allowing access into the forest, Chris and Liz Bowden of BirdLife International's Mount Kupe Forest Project for their ground support and Peter Colston of the BM, Tring for access to the relevant skins. ☉

References

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Elusive Congo Peacock found by film-maker Alan Root

John H. Fanshawe

In a recent letter, Alan Root, well known for his spectacular films of East African wildlife, vividly describes his search for the Congo Peacock *Afropavo congoensis*, one of many elusive animals he has been seeking to capture on film for a series on the ecology of Congo Basin forests.

He writes, "Giles Thornton [Alan Root's assistant] took a motorbike two days down a track that, 30 years ago, was the road to Opienge, 120 miles south-west of Epulu. There he cleared an old mission airstrip and I then flew in the 180 [Cessna light plane] with supplies and another *piki* [motorcycle]. We rode the bikes for another long day on forest trails to the Loya river on the park boundary, and then walked for two days into the park, where we set up a base camp. The hunters we took with us assured us we would hear peacocks when they went to roost, but, though we spent many evenings sitting on ridge tops we did not...perhaps because it was raining most days? We did find lots of signs, scratch marks where they had been feeding, tracks...(they could have been guineafowl), but then we found dust baths containing male and female peacock feathers. It was wonderful forest, full of all sorts of fruiting trees, and signs everywhere of Elephant, Chimps, Gorillas and Okapi."

"On about the tenth day [4 September 1993], I walked off on my own for about a kilometre, found a place where the forest floor was clear, and I had a good, long view, and sat on a stump to watch. After a couple of hours, I heard something rustling the leaf-litter about thirty yards away. It turned out to be a squirrel, and I watched it jump up from the forest floor onto a fallen log...that should have been the end of the leaf noise, but it was still going on...I raised my head from the binoculars to get a wide view, and the movement spooked a male peacock, who had been hidden by a fallen tree except for his head. He broke, but I had my bins right there already and I followed that wonderful head and crest as he ran, and he came out from behind the tree

and I got a great look at him as he scuttled off, low and leaning forward like a cock pheasant."

"I raced back to the hunters, yelling with excitement, and gave a great demonstration of what happens to a European who's been too long in the tropics. They all thought I'd been attacked and grabbed their spears to come to my aid!"

"The peacock does not appear to be rare in the area we operated in. I was wearing a feather in my hat that Don [Turner] got from the New York Zoo and gave me for luck; it was instantly recognised by the people there, and we know that two birds were trapped and eaten within a 50km radius in the three months we were there."

"I also have film of both Plumed and Black Guinea-fowl coming to eat termites spilling from an arboreal nest torn open by a Long-tailed Pangolin - this is going to be a flick for aficionados!! Other interesting dickies seen nesting have been White-crested Hornbill *Tockus albocristatus*, Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill *T. camurus*, and Black Wattled Hornbill *Ceratogymna atrata*, Grey-throated Rail *Canirallus oculus* and Spot-breasted Ibis *Bostrychia rara*."

Alan has also succeeded in finding some rarely seen mammals including; "...the Fishing Genet, known only from about a dozen skins...and I have some great film of them fishing, and Water Chevrotain, the mixed up pig-antelope, that we have discovered does not just swim and dive, but walks about on the bottom of rivers like a hippo...I have film of one walking, eyes open, through a school of fish. We also got film of *Potomogale*, the giant otter-shrew."

It's a great story and, in a subsequent letter, Alan reports that the rainforest film should be set for showing on Independent Television sometime in 1995. The editors will endeavour to publish advance warning of the details. ☺

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